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IS THERE A HELL?

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED BY

Rev. T. De Witt Talmage, D. D.

AT THE

BROOKLYN TABERNACLE, NEW YORK.

MR. SPURGEON SAYS, "DR. TALMAGE'S SERMONS LAY HOLD OF MY
INMOST SOUL."

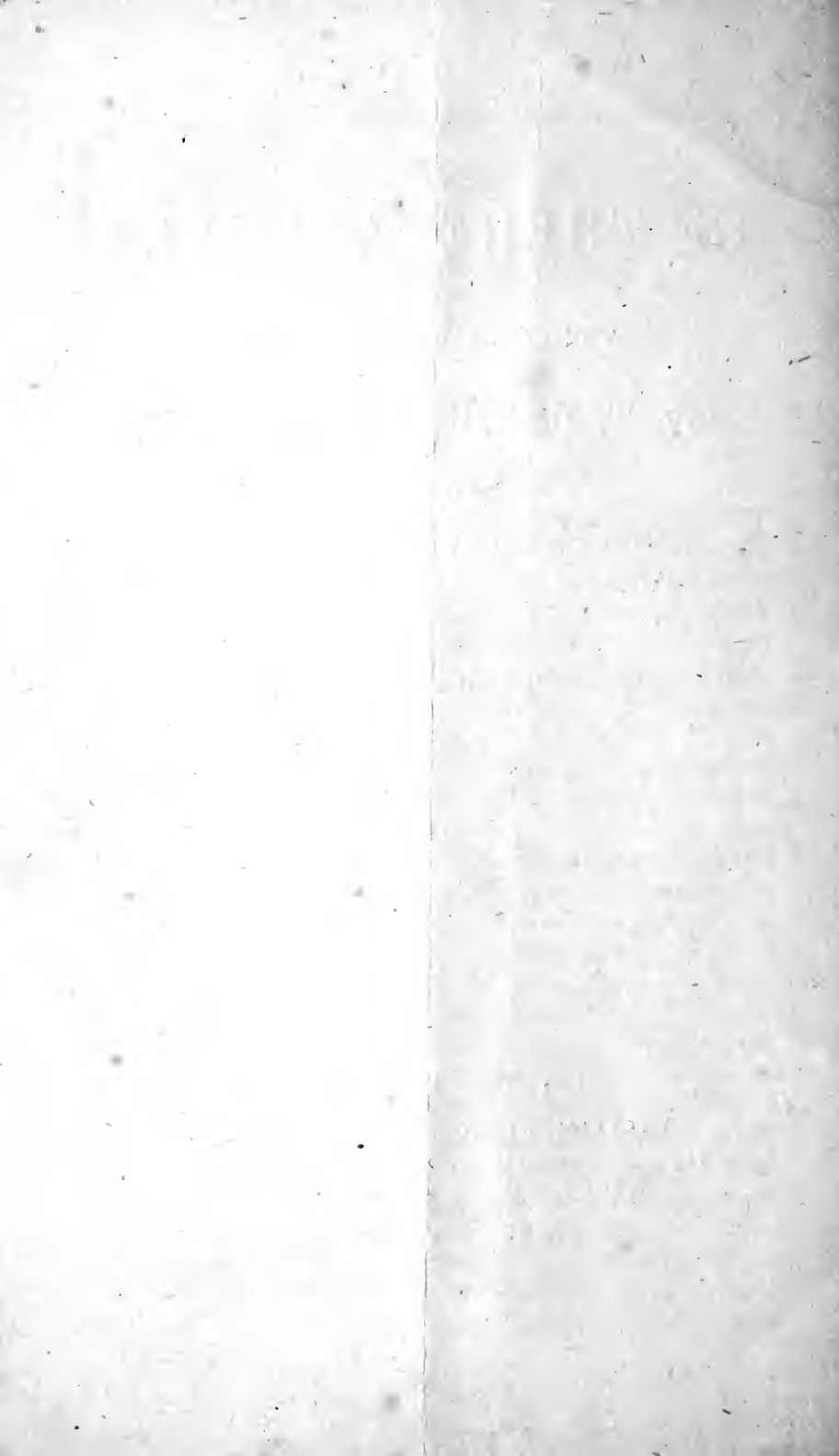
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IS THERE A HELL?

Thus saith the Lord—EXODUS iv. 22.

Thus saith the Lord—EXODUS ix. 13.

Thus saith the Lord—I SAMUEL ii. 27.

Thus saith the Lord—JOSHUA vii. 13.

Thus saith the Lord—JOSHUA xxiv. 2.

Thus saith the Lord—JUDGES vi. 8

Thus saith the Lord—I CHRONICLES xvii. 7,

Thus saith the Lord—JEREMIAH vi. 9

EIGHT texts, and all of them the same. The strangest thing in the history of American and European journalism is that during the past few months it has been discussing the question of eternal punishment. The question of Turko-Russian contest, the question of silver currency, the question as to President Hayes's policy with the South—all submerged into the question, "Is there a hell?" It makes but very little difference what De Witt Talmage says about this, for it is only a little while ago he began to breathe, and in a little while he will stop breathing. It makes but little difference what Dean Stanley, or Canon Farrar, or Mr. Frothingham think about this, for they have never been into the eternal world, and can give no personal experience. The Roman Catholic Church in all its Diets and through all its bishoprics has declared its belief in a place of future retribution, but that does not settle it for me. The Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian churches have adapted this theory in their creeds, but that does not settle it for me. This morning I cast aside all human authority and all human opinion. There is only one Being who can tell me now whether there is a hell. That Being is God. I reject every opinion except that on which is written, "Thus saith the Lord." I put one "Thus saith the Lord" against all the sermons, all the disquisitions, all the books of all the ages. "Thus saith the Lord." You see, my friends, I start in the assumption that the Bible is true. If you deny

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it is true, some other Sabbath I will argue that matter. As common-sense men you know that in making any argument on any secular or religious subject, there must be some common data, some common ground, where we shall start together. It would be as silly for me to try to prove to you, who reject the truth of the Bible, that there is a place of future retribution, as it would be for me to discuss fraud and crime and their penalties with a man who denies Blackstone and the statutes of the State of New York. Our common sense tells us that there must be some common ground where we can start. Now, in passing, I have to ask you who reject the Bible the questions, "Is there a God?" "Yes," you say, "Is He good?" "Yes," you say. Now, I ask you, is it not reasonable that a good God should give us a revelation of some kind? Is it not reasonable to suppose that such a Being, starting our race in this world, would give them some guide, some directory, some written help? "Of course," you say, "that's so." Now, which is it? If you will show me a book which seems to be a more reasonable and a better revelation from God than the Bible, I am willing to accept it. I like anything new and unique. By the constitution of my nature I prefer the new to the old. If you can hand me up a book this morning that seems to be a better revelation from God than the Bible, I will take it and I will preach from it. Is there a man in this house who denies what the Bible affirms? It is easy thus to deny. You tell me that the Turko-Russian war is nearly over. I deny there has ever been such a war. Moreover, I deny, for the sake of argument, that there ever have been any such places as Russia and Turkey. "But," you say, "you will admit that there are such places as Moscow and Constantinople?" No, I never saw them. "But," you say, "you must have seen the submarine telegrams in all the newspapers, coming from the seat of war?" Yes, but those telegrams were not sworn to, and I do not know but that all those newspapers and all those telegraphers may have made a conspiracy to deceive. In other words, I deny everything.

"Well," you say, "that is foolish." I admit it, but you are doing in regard to the Bible just what I am now doing in regard to geography.

You deny the geography of the eternal world, and I for the minute deny the geography of Europe. Good-bye, my brother. I have no time this morning to talk to you who reject the Bible. Some other Sabbath I will see you. I must turn now to those who believe the Bible to be true. Eternal Spirit of Almighty God, fall upon us now, while with fingers of dust we turn the sacred leaves, and with lips of ashes, we recite the most stupendous truths that ever shook the human soul. If we are honest men we will come to this subject as we would in the midst of a great freshet if we, at midnight, were on the Erie express train, and said to the conductor, "Conductor, do you think any of the bridges are down to-night?" with something of the feeling I had when our last lifeboat had been crushed to pieces in the midst of the ocean cyclone, and I said to the officer, "Officer, do you think we will ever get to New York?" I have no sympathy with the flippant discussion of this truth, nor with the manner on the part of a preacher which seems to say—"You impenitent people will be lost, and serve you right!" I feel that I am a sinner, and because of the million transgressions of my heart and life I must perish unless some one can show me a way out from under the condemnation. The platform on which I stand may be two or three feet higher than the pew in which you sit; but I realise that I am not raised the thousandth part of an inch above the level on which we must stand in judgment before God. I do not know how people can jest about this subject, and yet it is the subject of more puns, more caricatures, more jokes in the offices and shops than any other subject. Why do they not joke about the broken bridge at Ashtabula? or the *Atlantic* steamer going down off Mars Head with five hundred passengers? or the earthquake that crushed Lisbon? or the London plague? There is more reason for jest in all those subjects than in this. Let us come to this subject not as critics, not as

cavillers, not in a polemic spirit. Let us come to it as a question of personal safety. Let us empty ourselves of all previous impressions, and without any disposition to twist things, or explain them away, find out what is the announcement of the only authority on this subject that is worth so much as a pin.

In the first place, I group together all those passages which represent the suffering of the lost by fire. In Matthew it is said, "At the end of the world the angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire." Can you not explain it away? Oh! yes. I could make these angels fairies; I could represent this fire as only something looking like fire; I could represent this furnace as a casket with a crimson lining; but what is the use of explaining away a furnace of fire when God says there is one? What is the use of a criminal trying to explain away the existence of the place of punishment? But you say, "Isn't there some mistake about it?" If there is, then the Lord Christ made the mistake, for the passage I quoted is part of *His* sermon. I appeal to Paul on this subject. He was no coward. Instead of his trembling before governors, governors trembled before him. A small invalid, but the most magnificent man of the ages. What does he say? He says to the Thessalonians: "The Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God." I appeal to St. John, the inspired. In one place he says of the lost: "They shall be tormented with fire and brimstone." In another place he says: "The adulterers, the sorcerers, and all liars shall have their place in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." And in another place he says: "They shall both be cast alive into the lake of fire." The last book of the Bible closes with a dark scroll on the sky.

What is it? Smoke. Where there is no fire there is no smoke. "The smoke of their torment ascended for ever and ever." "But," you say, "were not these men who

wrote this?" Yes, but they were inspired men. If you do not want to take even inspired men, then I go back to Christ again, and as my first quotation on this subject was from Christ, so my last quotation under this head shall be from Christ, as He says: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." "But," you say, "isn't this figurative?" I am not opposed to saying it may be figurative, but I know very well that if it is not fire, it is something as severe as fire. Christ and His Apostles were not lacking illustrative power, and when they say a thing is morning, I know it is as bright as it can be, and when they say anything is a prison I know it is a galling thralldom, and when they say anything is fire, I know it is a torment unmitigated. I often hear people explain these fiery representations of scripture as metaphor, and as soon as they make metaphor out of them, they seem to think they have soothed the whole subject. No; if there be a mental state as sharp and severe as fire, it might as well be fire. Christ and His Apostles use the figure of fire, and I know that there is nothing more painful or more agonising. But if you want some other figure, take it. Say it is a penitentiary, iron-bolted, iron-barred, iron-locked, the door opening in and not out. I will not dispute with you. If you will, say it is a maelstrom which dashes and breaks to pieces and swallows down all those that come within the sweep of its foaming circles. I will not dispute you.

If you prefer those human similes, take them. I prefer God's comparison, because I know God is right, and human comparisons may be wrong. God says it is fire, and a furnace of fire. Besides that, my brother, I do not know that it is figurative. It may be literal. The Bible sixteen times says it is fire. The whole race is sinful and rebellious, and underneath that race there is a furnace glowing, cracking, roaring, raving, and we shall all be plunged in it unless we escape on one condition, which I shall mention at a later point in my sermon. You say "I don't believe it, and I won't believe it." Then be consistent and pitch your Bible into the stove, or throw it into

the river. Thomas Paine was consistent in denying the doctrine of eternal punishment, for he rejected the whole Bible, although in his last moments he howled with so much terror that his nurse fled from the room. He was consistent nevertheless. Voltaire was consistent in rejecting the doctrines of future punishment, because he rejected the whole Bible, although he did not seem to be so very well persuaded of the non-existence of perdition, for when his friend wrote to him, "I have found out for sure that there is no hell," Voltaire replied, "I congratulate you; I am not so fortunate as you are." But still he was tolerably consistent, for as well as he might he rejected the whole Bible. But, my brother, you have a Bible in your hand, you have a Bible in your bedroom, you have a Bible in your nursery, you have a Bible in your parlour. Your children have Bibles, and all these Bibles say that there is a world of fire for those who do not escape on a certain condition which I shall in a few moments mention. Now, overboard with your Bible, or overboard with your unbelief. Keeping both your Bible and your unbelief you stultify yourself beyond all other possibility of stultification.

The next thing I have to do is group all those passages which show the indignation of God against sin and the sinner, and, hence, the possibility of such a place as I have spoken of. Out of a hundred sermons ninety-eight of them are on the love of God, the mercy of God, the kindness of God, and if we preach two sermons out of the one hundred in regard to the indignation of God we are styled "sulphuric." Our American preaching needs to be reconstructed on this doctrine of God's indignation. So recreant are we, the American clergy, on this subject that the vast majority of you people here to-day do not know the Bible more frequently speaks of the wrath of God than it does of the love of God. Not because God has more wrath than mercy, but because he knew the world would be slow to believe it. We have not enough backbone of moral courage to preach the whole Bible. So we go preaching a one-sided God, with a character which we

would despise in ourselves! Do you ever get angry? Suppose a ruffian should knock your little girl into the gutter,—would you smile about it? Would you reward him for it? Suppose, passing down the street, you saw three or four men, with hods of brick on their shoulders, going up a long ladder, and some one should come to the foot of the ladder and hurl it away, and the three or four men should dash down and lose their lives—would you smile about it? Would you reward him for it? No. There are a hundred things in your life that excite your indignation, and if you are never aroused in that way it is because you are imbecile. Yet, what do they say of God? Why, the whole race can go on defying Him, breaking His law, murdering His only-begotten Son, striking in the face the Lord Almighty, and He will smile on them through all eternity. Bible-holders, I want you to recognize the fact that God in the Bible more often speaks of His indignation than He does of His mercy. Twenty-eight times does the Bible speak of the love of God. Sixty-one times does it speak of His wrath and His indignation. Here is Cruden's "Concordance." I brought it along with the passages all collated. I will lay it at the foot of the pulpit. It is quite an expensive book, and some of you may not have it or be able to get it. I lay it at the foot of the pulpit, and you can count the passages for yourself at the close of the service. Oh! can we preach the Bible without preaching the indignation of God, as well as the love of God? I will recite to you some of the passages which show the Lord's indignation, and hence the possibility of such a place as I am thinking of. In Thessalonians: "Taking vengeance on them that know not God." In Revelation: "They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of Almighty God, poured without mixture into the cup of His indignation." The figure, you see, is a pitcher and a bowl. Into the pitcher are compressed the clusters that have grown under the hot sun of indignation; and then the wine, seething, bubbling, is poured out from the pitcher into the bowl, and the lost soul, compelled to put trembling hands to that

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bowl, presses it to the lips and drinks the draught until all the contents are drained. You do not like the figure? It is not wine. "Thus saith the Lord. They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of Almighty God, poured without mixture into the cup of His indignation." In another place the Bible says, "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness," and over that abyss we are all suspended, unless we escape on one condition to be mentioned at a later point. It is too early to mention it. What does a man want to know of a life raft when he is sure of no shipwreck? Not persuaded yet? Revelation; "The wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." Not yet persuaded that there is a wrath side as well as a love side to the Almighty? Isaiah 33—and this passage perhaps you have never heard quoted: "And the people shall be as burnings of lime; as thorns cut up shall they be burned up in the fire. Hear, ye that are afar off, what I have done, and ye that are near acknowledge my might."

Not yet persuaded? I quote once more Isaiah: "I will tread them in my wrath and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment." Does that quotation irritate you with me? I did not say it. "Thus saith the Lord." Not persuaded with what Samuel says, and Micah says, and Daniel says, and Jeremiah says, and Ezekiel says, and Paul says, and Christ says, and Jehovah says? Not persuaded? Then I shall have to leave you to be persuaded by your own experience, when the truths of God's burnished throne shall flame on you. The fact is that all the Bible-holders in this audience by this time, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, are persuaded that there is a hell. How long shall it last? I will answer that question to-morrow night. How do you accord this with the love and mercy of God? I will answer that question to-morrow night. What do you think of the theories of Canon Farrar, and Dean Stanley, and Mr. Frothingham? I will answer that question to-morrow night. This morning I have noth-

ing to do with objections. I will simply state to you that God fifty-six times, in the plainest, most unmistakable, stupendous, and overwhelming way, declares that there is a hell. It is burning now. It has been burning a long while. It is becoming fiercer by the victims that are ever being dropped into it. Yea, I will go further, and say there is a possibility, aye, there is a probability that there are some in this house to-day who will spend eternity in the lost world. Nothing but the hand of an outraged, defied, insulted, long-suffering, indignant, omnipotent God keeps this whole audience this moment from sliding like one avalanche into it. Oh! God, what a crisis! Has not the time come for me to tell this people that there is no need that any of them go there? I am going to announce to you that five or ten may escape—yea, a hundred—yea, a thousand—yea, all. You say: "Tell me just now." Oh! I do not want to break on you the glad tidings too suddenly. I want to tell you that there is no more need that you go to that world than that you should leap into the Geysers of California, or the crater of Cotopaxi. Tell the people, gentlemen of the press, tell them that I said there was no reason that anybody should go there; that if anybody goes there he is a suicide of his immortal soul. I turn to the same old book and I find out that the Son of Mary, who was the Son of God, the darling of heaven, the champion of the ages, by some called Lord, by some called Jesus, by others called Christ, but this morning by us called by the three blessed titles, Lord Jesus Christ, by one magnificent stroke made it possible for us all to be saved. He not only told us that there was a hell, but He went into it. He walked down the fiery steeps. He stepped off the bottom rung of the long ladder of despair. He descended into hell. He put His bare foot on the hottest coal of the fiercest furnace. He explored the darkest den of eternal midnight, and then He came forth lacerated and bleeding, and mauled by the hands of infernal excruciation, to cry out to all the ages: "I have paid the price for all those who would make Me their substitute. By My groans, by

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My agony, I demand the rescue of all those who will give up sin and trust in Me." Mercy! mercy! mercy! But how am I to get it? Cheap. It will not cost you as much as a loaf of bread. Only a penny? No, no! Escape from hell, and all the harps and mansions and thrones and sunlit fields of heaven besides in the bargain, "without money and without price." Now, I ask you as common-sense men and women, if one has a choice between heaven and hell, and he may escape from one and he may win the other, and he refuses to do so—I ask you, as men and women of common sense, if he does not deserve to be lost. He does. You know he does. Oh! by the free salvation of Christ, by the voice of the eternal groan which we have heard this morning, I beg all this audience to flee from the wrath to come. Do not, my friend, make it a controversy between you and me; it is a controversy between you and God. Do not go away talking of what I said; go away talking of what God said. My dear brother, my dear sister, you may shuffle this whole subject off your attention, but that does not change the fact. Your impenitent course is certainly leading you to that lost world. You are on the road to hell! Turn around! and start on the road to Heaven. Oh! it seems as if my pulses never beat so swiftly as they do this minute, and it is in emotion lest some of you be lost. My heart, it seems as if it would break. God knows that I have never prayed over any sermon as I have prayed over this, and yet how powerless I am to make you see things as you will see them on your dying bed; as you will see them when the front gate of eternity swings open upon your amazed spirit. With one more quotation I will leave this whole subject between you and God's arousing, convicting, converting Spirit. Isaiah xxxiii. 14: "Who of us can dwell with devouring fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Who? Who?

[Between five and six thousand people were present during the delivery of this discourse, and thousands could not get inside the tabernacle. The services opened with that well known hymn of Wesley's, "A charge to keep I have."]

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